

## SCIENCE, DOGMA AND BIAS IN SOCIAL REFORM.

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**B**IOLOGISTS, economists and sociologists are disposed to resent lay opposition to, or skepticism toward, their "scientific" judgments and conclusions. How dare uneducated, untrained persons question and even resist the verdicts handed down in the name of Social Science? Why are not economic, political, sociological or biological authorities entitled to the same respect and deference with which astronomers, physicists, chemists and geologists are treated by the general public? Why should not science be cheerfully accepted as the leader and guide in social reform? Why should not lawmakers consult men of science instead of heterogeneous, ignorant and prejudiced constituencies? Would not humanity advance toward its goal—that of Justice and Solidarity and Brotherly Relations—much more rapidly than it is advancing—if it is advancing at all—if the competent and the learned, the seekers of Truth for its own sake, and the disinterested were, by common consent, empowered to lay down policies and frame legislation for modern communities?

In view of the impatience of many radicals with the slow, "inert" majority, and of the readiness of many of them to resort to brute force and violence for the sake of their noble ideals, it may be well to answer the foregoing questions after putting one's self in the place of a true spokesman of the conservative majority. If the inarticulate average mass were to speak and explain its attitude toward social and political radicalism, what would it be apt to say?

In the first place, it would say this: "Social Physician, convert your brother physicians to your diagnosis and remedies before asking and expecting us to swallow the latter on faith. We may be ignorant, but we know that you doctors and scholars disagree on almost every important issue. Which of your factions or schools are we to follow?"

In the realm of social theory and proposed social reform there

are at least half a dozen schools of radical thought and some schools of liberal thought. Even the conservatives are not all intellectually bankrupt and negligible. Where, then, is that Social Science which lays claim to the role of master and sovereign guide?

"Produce your Science, secure its acceptance by the cultivated and trained," we may imagine the majority as saying, "and you will have a case worthy of our consideration." And who can answer this satisfactorily?

Yet the majority need not be, and is not, contented or complacent. It knows and feels that the present social order is in many respects repugnant to our sense of justice, of humanity, of decency. It knows that there is too much special privilege in society, and too much unmerited misery and suffering. It knows that too many of those who toil and practice the fundamental virtues are condemned to narrow, joyless, sordid lives, and that many others, though willing and anxious to toil, lack even the opportunity of earning their daily bread. Assuredly, the average conservative or moderate will say, there are great wrongs and iniquities in our system, and it behooves us to ponder the profound problem and work out its solution. But while awaiting that happy consummation, what is the majority to do?

Destroy the present system on the theory that nothing could possibly be worse, and that the majority has nothing to lose by taking a plunge into chaos? The human mind is too reasonable, the influence of common sense is too strong, to offer much encouragement to the insignificant groups of destructive revolutionists who proceed upon that theory. The majority has something, nay *much*, to lose, and will not gamble with the essential features of the present order. The majority will never adopt the fanatical slogan, "The worse, the better." Intolerable oppression and ruthless tyranny of individuals or small groups have at times provoked savage revolutionary outbreaks, but no sober-minded person will compare the conditions of modern society in Western Europe or America with the conditions which begot the French revolution or the Russian revolution of our own day. The evils and maladjustments of which we have spoken do indeed cause us anxiety and deep concern, but they are not of the kind, or degree, that cause violent social explosions. There has been, and there is promise of, too much evolutionary progress to warrant blind fury and resentment.

Talk of red terror and sanguinary social warfare is indulged

in, as a rule, by youthful and inexperienced enthusiasts who have read a few books, but have not had the discipline of human contacts and stubborn facts that check impulse, correct error and teach patience and give-and-take.

However, though the fulminations and empty threats of the destructive radicals need not be taken too seriously, this cannot be said of the smug satisfaction and shallow optimism of the unthinking conservatives, or of the blind and perverse obscurantism of the social Bourbons. These things must be taken very seriously indeed. They are dangerous, if sophomoric and derivative radicalism is not. It is to be borne in mind at all times that, though the burden of proof rests on the innovators and the reform agitators—and the majority instinctively places, and justly the burden right there—the correlative of receiving, considering, weighing the evidence and the arguments presented against the present order rests upon its supporters and defenders.

The immemorial controversy between statics and dynamics, the established and the new, the present and the future, is too often forgotten both by the conservatives and the radicals of a particular epoch. The former act on the implied belief that change is bad and undesirable *per se*, and that humanity longs for stability, safety, routine. The latter appear to think that humanity is restless, eager for change, hungry for adventures and dubious experiments. The truth, of course, is that humanity is always divided against itself, wanting change, yet disliking and fearing innovations that upset or disturb its habits and settled ways. Variety is the spice of life, yet most of us are reluctant to make hazardous experiments. We complain of the present, but flying to possible and probable evils we know not of, strikes us as quite unreasonable. Historic institutions, on the whole, are what they are because they fit human nature and the conditions under which they function. They are not accidents. They are growths and adaptations. They take root. They respond, however, to changes in the conditions which surround and nourish them, and gradually they may become so altered in aspect and composition as to be unrecognizable. But, in arguing for deliberate changes in institutions, we must demonstrate that the latter have ceased to fit conditions and human nature and have become, or are in process of becoming, obstacles and nuisances.

This is exactly what the sober-minded evolutionary reformer undertakes to do. He has no quarrel with the past. He has a sense of fact or reality. He merely contends and proves that, be-

cause certain developments have already taken place, certain other developments are certain to follow and ought not to be obstructed. The evolutionary reformer facilitates inevitable change by interpreting it, by preparing minds for it, by dispelling prejudice and misgivings. He is not arrogant, for even if he sees the situation steadily and sees it whole, and is in the main right in his diagnosis and prognosis, he is yet aware that no great social change takes place strictly according to philosophers' programmes and schedules. He is prepared for large concessions to his opponents, for modifications of his best-laid plans. Such a temper or attitude of mind is clearly incompatible with bigotry and fanatical dogmatism.

Thus we see that the slow, conservative majority has more reason on its side in refusing to be stampeded by revolutionists than the latter have for railing at or condemning the majority.

How ridiculous, in truth, are those impatient radicals who, because the majority does not swallow their notions and scrap the existing social order at their bidding, lose all faith in humanity and gloomily pronounce its doom! What engineer, architect or builder would first make plans, reach conclusions, and then, finding that he has not reckoned with his materials, savagely attack innocent parts of nature—wood, stone, iron, ore, etc.? The man of science first studies his materials and his tools. He does not undertake what he cannot execute. He is not disappointed or angry when he discovers that a certain pillar will stand only a certain stress. He does not indict nature. He does not "curse God and die" because facts fail to support fancies or working hypotheses. Why should the social reformer feel free to draw up Utopias, to devise plans, without first making perfectly sure that his materials and instruments, human beings, are ready to act the parts assigned to them?

Nothing is more common than the complaint that men are unduly governed by bias and by self-interest. As if human life could exist if there were no bias and no self-interest! Men simply cannot act contrary to their own instincts, intuitions, judgments, experiences. Even the grossest superstitions are based on what their victims believe to be the evidence of their senses, the processes of reason, the testimony of vital experience. No man will ever disregard what he feels to be a fact in favor of what some one else paints to him in rosy colors as a sound theory. The cure for superstition, in politics as in religion, is knowledge—that is, more and fuller experience, a deeper and better understanding of facts. The rational reformer does not ask those whom he seeks

to convert to accept some one's opinions blindly, but to consider them, weigh them, test them in the light of direct and vital experience, and accept them only if, after such analysis and testing, they appear to be true. In other words, the rational reformer does not ask men to lift themselves by their own bootstraps, or to put away their own ideas and sentiments in favor of those of other men. He asks them to study new evidence, new interpretations of facts, and to modify their opinion in obedience to the inner compulsion of their own maturer judgments.

To take one illustration. Many years ago Spencer argued that the scientific or philosophical study of sociological problems is rendered peculiarly difficult by the bias of class, nationality, race, clique, narrow conceptions of self-interest, and the like. He affirmed that there was a patriotic bias and also an anti-patriotic bias, a class bias as well as a bias begotten of pride of opinion and congenital intolerance and bigotry. But he did not conclude that for these reasons a science of sociology must always be impossible. He only argued that such a science must be cautiously and patiently built up, allowance being made for every sort of counsel-darkening bias and painstaking to check and correct any particular bias by honestly estimating the strength of any conflicting bias. Truth and equilibrium are eventually reached by such matching of minds, prejudices, theories.

Now, are there any alternatives to this course? Only two are conceivable. One, as was said at the outset, is a Dictatorship that frankly repudiates free discussion and education, that relies exclusively on physical force and in the name of Justice and Humanity practices ruthless tyranny and resorts to the most inhumane and ferocious methods. Russian Bolshevism deliberately elected this course—with what consequences all but the willfully blind can now see. Evolution along healthy and democratic lines was rejected with contempt in 1917 by the Bolshevik chiefs. They demanded get-reformed-quick policies. They preferred civil war and proletarian supremacy; because of that fatal choice they have inflicted cruel and widespread misery on the Russian masses, including their pet "class-conscious" wage workers in the cities. Civil war, hunger, pestilence, a brutish and degrading competition for food and other absolute necessities of life—these have been the fruits of the insensate war on "Capitalism."

The other possible alternative is such an absolutely sterile and irrational mysticism as, for example, Bernard Shaw has been

driven to embrace in his latest freakish book, "Back to Methuselah." Mr. Shaw began political and literary life as a Fabian Socialist. He never had the patience and the philosophy which he preached to others. But he has always been fundamentally serious and earnest. A few years ago he announced a new theology, but ethically and socially he remained true to his conception of Evolution and of Christianity. The world, he contended, must return to Religion and must reorganize its economic and material life in accordance with the spirit and essence of Christian doctrine. In Fabian Socialism, he asserted, lay the solution of the world's tragic problems, for that form of Socialism alone embodies the ideals common to Christians and scientific evolutionists. But where does he stand today? He despairs of humanity. He abandons hope. Human beings, as he knows them, have neither the wisdom nor the character required by Socialism. They will fumble, muddle, blunder, and eventually destroy what civilization there is unless, unless they succeed, by wishing and willing, in prolonging the average span of life to three hundred years! And how would a generation of Methuselahs solve the great problem of human conduct? By establishing Socialism? No; by further willing to abolish the body and become pure spirit!

Count Tolstoy, in his final phase of mysticism, invited humanity to commit suicide by taking vows of celibacy and heroically putting an end to the reproduction of the race. Shaw, though in sympathy with Tolstoy, cannot urge such a counsel of perfection on his contemporaries. He knows them too well—and he has humor. So he postpones the catastrophe, but at bottom he is a pessimist of the extremest type. He cannot join the destructive radicals, so he evolves out of his inner consciousness a pseudo-scientific mysticism of his own. Science and human nature have cruelly disappointed him: he has recourse to magic!

Now, neither of these alternatives is even remotely related to science, to history or to common sense. Terrible are indeed the sins and blunders of poor, groping, perplexed humanity. The world war was an indictment of our culture, our science, our international labor and reform organization, our trade and commerce, that was hard—almost impossible—to meet. There is no occasion for astonishment in the fact that the war caused dismay, despair and bitterness even among persons of exceptional poise and breadth of view. But after further and deeper reflection what conclusion does the normal mind reach? Why, the conclusion



that humanity has the power and the opportunity to direct its own moral and social development, and to eradicate or mitigate practically all the evils which offend our sense of justice and our generous sentiments. Our problems are grave and difficult, but none of them is insoluble. Indeed, to use the words of Prof. Stewart Paton in a new book on "Human Behavior," "The hope for the progress of civilization today has probably a more substantial basis to rest upon than at any other period in the history of the human race." Tens of thousands of earnest men and women are grappling with the questions we have inherited from the past—racial, national and class questions. Democracy has many faults, but its one supreme virtue is its inevitable insistence on equality of opportunity and the elimination of special privilege. Peace and social harmony are incompatible with privilege, and there is but little doubt as to which will have to "go." Special privilege—that's the enemy. It must be routed in every field which it has invaded. It breeds war at home and abroad. It is the child of avarice and greed and ignorance. It is responsible for the substitution of exploitation for service and fair dealing. Fight privilege and you attack the tap root of the worst features of our civilization.

Having realized this truth, and having enlisted a greater army in the campaign against privilege than was ever organized to defend civilization, shall we fritter away our strength by quarreling violently about little paper schemes and ingenious Utopias? Shall we despair of humanity because of differences among reformers just when an opportunity is offered of putting aside minor issues and launching a world-wide campaign for international and inter-class justice?

The slow, inert majority, to repeat, will follow neither the wild and frantic revolutionists nor disillusioned mystics like Bernard Shaw, whose ideas are fundamentally anti-social and unhistorical. The majority will follow constructive and reasonable leaders who know how to appeal to the best instead of the worst elements in human nature; who expect no miracles but who have faith and courage; who build on the rocks of natural bias and legitimate self-interest—which are reconcilable with sound Altruism—rather than in the sands of an imaginary, super-human freedom from bias and self-regarding motives.

Humanity longs for such leadership and is certain to follow it, in the long run. Fanaticism of the all-or-nothing temper, dogmatism and arid mysticism will have their small, local and ephemeral

triumphs. Pessimism may be fashionable among the "superior" few who refuse to accept humanity, if not the universe, as it is. But the generality of mankind will pursue the even tenor of its empirical way, profit by trial and error, cross no bridges before reaching them and applying no solutions to problems not thoroughly dramatized and realized. The true scientific spirit makes allowance for the conservatism of the mass and is only amused by the antics of the social quacks and the theatrical revolutionists. It has faith in human nature and in human reason.